



Editorial

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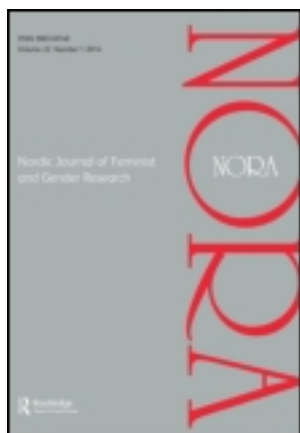
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EDITORIAL

The gendered/sexed body travels through the articles and book reviews in this issue of NORA. The articles attest to the observation that feminist materialism has become an influential and productive theoretical turn, which enables us to ask new questions as well as take up familiar ones in new ways. The analyses presented in the articles illustrate the strength of the historically fixed binary structuring of gender categories and the associated disciplining of bodily matter. However, inspired by a feminist materialist view of the body as fluid and non-bounded matter, they also read against this fixity, thus examining both how bodies become caught up in the gridlock of categories and how the discursive-material reality of bodily matter slips through these grids.

In “En-Gendering the Sublime: Aesthetics and Politics in the Eighteenth Century” Kristina Fjelkestam analyses the (gender) politics of the sublime and argues that the notion of citizenship is thoroughly intertwined with this aesthetic category. As a philosophy of the body and through its orientation towards emotions, aesthetics in its modern version was coded in feminine terms, but the concept of the sublime was nevertheless considered masculine. Taking her point of departure in Kant and Edmund Burke, Fjelkestam argues “that Kant’s en-gendering of the sublime develops political consequences, in which women are disqualified from citizenship, because of his claim that they only have the innate capacity for a ‘beautiful’ understanding—not one of sublimely ennobling magnitude”. Thus, eighteenth-century political theory constructed the universal (male) citizen through an aesthetic framework, since the ability to act ethically was seen as an essential feature of the citizen—and that capability in turn was defined as sublime.

While women were thus initially prevented from entering the space of politics, they have since become—paraphrasing Nirmal Puwar—space invaders (Puwar 2004). Erkkä Railo transports our attention to gendered political subjectivity and the body of the citizen from eighteenth-century philosophy closer to the present day in his analysis of the positioning of female Finnish politicians in the women’s magazine *Anna* between 1975 and 2005. Despite the leap forward in time, the Enlightenment notions of gendered citizenship pointed out by Fjelkestam prevail as a backdrop to the representations of female bodies in politics. Railo argues that the articles in *Anna* consistently address two issues that are seen as barriers to the political participation of women: the private lives of female politicians and the female body, which is considered to be unsuitable for political work. Railo follows the development in significations of the female politician’s body in *Anna* over 30 years, answering the question: “How do the significations assigned to female bodies define their subject position in relation to the institution of the state?”

The articles by Fjelkestam and Railo complement each other across the historical divide—and across the divide between “high” (political philosophy) and “low”

(women's magazines) culture; a similar line of communication is opened up between the articles by Ann-Sofie Lönngren on Strindberg's *A Madman's Manifesto* and Rocío Carrasco on contemporary US virtual reality films.

Ann-Sofie Lönngren re-reads Strindberg through a lens of feminist materialism and in particular Karen Barad's framework in "Swelling, Leaking, Merging—A Material Feminist Reading of August Strindberg's *A Madman's Manifesto*". Lönngren thus revisits her own (and others') queer-inspired readings of Strindberg, asking what implications the turn towards materialism might have for literary analysis. She argues that the humanist foundation of literary scholarship creates a blindness towards textual aspects, making them appear as absurdities, not least in so-called "realistic" texts. Thus, with respect to *A Madman's Manifesto*, there are rich discussions of heteronormativity as well as gendered and sexual transgressions, but the monstrous bodies and somatic alterations are rarely taken up. Even if Barad's conceptualization of matter as agential does not refer to literary readings, Lönngren argues that it allows us to tell stories that are otherwise silenced about characters who do not have a position from which they may speak. In *A Madman's Manifesto*, the narrator's heteronormative discourse may thus be partly subverted through a focus on processes of literary materialization. This enables the telling of a non-normative body narrative of same-sex relations that is not de-humanizing.

As Lönngren points out in her article, "the literary genre that is often referred to within material feminism is science fiction". This is the genre into which Rocío Carrasco delves (albeit in the medium of film rather than text) in the article "(Re) defining the Gendered Body in Cyberspace: The Virtual Reality Film". Like Lönngren, Carrasco takes her point of departure in the materialist turn within feminism, here with an emphasis on Rosi Braidotti's deleuzian materialism and Katherine Hayle's posthumanist framework. Carrasco argues that the virtual reality film offers opportunities for understanding the complex relationship between humanity and information technologies. More specifically, this relationship is analysed and discussed through the body images offered by virtual reality films. While radical redefinitions of the human body are not displayed in this popular genre, the body images they present do blur or move beyond dualistic assumptions of gender and sex, suggesting the instability of the human body in cyberspace. Even if it is "not possible simply to step away from cultural constructions of gender, the virtual reality film urges audiences to find new modes of conceptualization". Carrasco analyses *Johnny Mnemonic*, *The 13th Floor*, *eXistenZ*, and *The Matrix* and argues that these films all hint at the complexities of corporeality in virtual reality contexts.

The future is also the theme of the position paper "What about the Future? The Troubled Relationship between Futures and Feminism" by Helena Bergman, Kristina Engwall, Ulrika Gunnarsson-Östling, and Livia Johannesson. Here the troubled relationship between futures and feminisms is discussed in the context of the lack of connection between feminist studies of the future and mainstream futures studies. They argue that there is a need to consider the implications of the lack of feminist interventions in the field of futures studies, for example regarding the possibilities of critical discussions of potential feminist futures.

While we happily present this issue of NORA, which we think attests to the swelling, leaking, and merging creativity of contemporary feminist and gender

research on the past, the present, and the future, we also have less happy news from the world of Nordic gender journals. The Swedish Journal for Gender Research (*Tidskrift för Genusvetenskap*) and 30 other Swedish journals within the humanities and social sciences stand to lose their economic support from The Swedish Research Council (*Vetenskapsrådet*). The argument seems to be that we should all publish in international and English-language journals. The Nordic feminist and gender research environment—and NORA—greatly benefits from the existence of journals in the respective Nordic languages. We thus hope that the ongoing protests will be successful.

Kirsten Hvenegård-Lassen & Pauline Stoltz

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